COMPASSION

TO THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED

IN THE

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"All the widows stood weeping, and shewing the coats and garments "which Dorcas made while she was with them." *Acts*, c. 9. v.

"Ubicunque homo est, ibi beneficio locus est." *Seneca.*

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1810.

SERMON.

Galatians c. 2. v. 10. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same that I also was forward to do.

"THE poor shall never cease out of the land."* "The poor ye have always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." † Such was the language in which God addressed the Israelites; and such the Lord Jesus employed when the officious attention of a sincere penitent to his person was censured as an uncharitable profusion.

In every age the indigent have existed and have commonly formed large portions of the mass of society. The character and condition of man forbid the expectation that this state of things, will ever be greatly reversed. He is a sinner. His indolence, his pride, his dilatory temper, and his restless appetite, his caprice and his imprudence would produce a state of penury, though drunkenness and lust were not indulged. Man is a sinner in society with others. In the community of which he is a member, thieves are preparing to break through and steal. The widows and the fatherless children have adversaries. The unsuspicious become victims of the designing, and the easy often remain to lament, in poverty, their ill-directed sympathies.

Sometimes the governments of the world, far from securing the interests of the commonwealth, their professed aim, are productive of wretchedness to thousands. Is a sceptre swayed by age and weakness, "out of prison an old and foolish "king cometh to reign and he that is born in his king-"dom becometh poor."‡ Is the supreme power at the controul of a hero, who fills a nation with soldiery? The existence

* Deuteronomy, c. 15. v. 11. † Mark, c. 14. v. 7.
‡ Eccl. Chap. 4. 14. verse.

and movements of vast armies always multiply the number of the impoverished and the distressed. When Uzziah reigned and Amos prophesied, God, by his prophet, declares his determination to punish the armed men of Judah, because "they sold the righteous, for silver, and the poor for a pair of "shoes."* They are charged with "treading upon the poor;" with taking from him "burdens of wheat," and selling "the refuse." Strangers to humanity, they are to be contemplated as beasts rather than men, "Hear this word ye kine of Bashan." It is our mercy, my brethren, that from calamities, such as these, the sovereign of nations has preserved us.

The affairs of mortals are under the direction of an uncontroulable providence. The divine hand is to be traced in the varied lot of men. "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich."† of this truth the patriarch was sensible and was prepared to say "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away."

A thousand occurrences, which man is incapable of foreseeing or avoiding, may reduce him from affluence to want. On the seas, storms and shipwrecks may devour his property; on the shores, fire may suddenly consume it, "Except the Lord "build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the "Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is "vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread "of sorrows."* Sickness and age un-nerve the arm of industry; the cold and snows of winter create new necessities; and sometimes, the hand of death rends from a family its chief supporter. In such an economy, the wisdom and goodness of Jehovah are discernible. The rich are provided with a sphere for benevolent exertion and the poor are taught to rely on *his* providence who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the fowls of the air; the sensibilities of the heart are awakened

* Amos, Chap. 4, 5 verse. † Psalm 127 Chap. 1. verse 2.

and men become powerfully allied to each other, by having duties and dependencies intimately mingled.

It was probably in relation to this last source of poverty, the visitations of God, that our text was uttered. A little before the sun of prophecy went down; prophets came "from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the spirit, that there should be great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea."* These brethren felt the calamity more severely, as on the effusion of the spirit at the feast of Pentecost "as many as were possessors of houses and lands, sold them," and laid "the prices of the things" at the apostles feet, and as Judea was the seat of the first fierce persecution that was directed against the followers of Christ.

At the time Paul addressed the churches in Galatia: two things appear to have been circulated among them, by designing men to his disadvantage. He was represented as deriving his knowledge of the Christian system from the apostles; and it was insinuated that his doctrine, and that which the apostles taught, were not in harmony with each other. From the first of these ideas, the inference was probably drawn, that as a mere learner he was unfit to instruct; and from the last, that as a teacher of false doctrine, he was to be resisted or shunned. But the apostle answers, "I certify you brethren, that the gospel which is preached by me is not after man; I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"† Had Paul learned the gospel from others, it must have been before his conversion, or after it...not before; for then says he, "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it"...not after, for he adds, "when it pleased God to reveal his son in me that I might

* Acts 11, Chap. 27, 29 verse. † 1 Chap. 12, 13 verse.

preach among the heathen, *immediately*, I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them who were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."*

The second imputation he disproves with equal facility and effect. So far from any discord existing between the doctrines taught by him and by the apostles; he says, when "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."* The right hand of fellowship was an incontrovertible token that, their faith and affection, their aim and ardour, their sufferings and consolations were one. They would indeed that he should remember the poor; meaning the poor saints at Jerusalem, the poor scattered through the churches of Christ; or, the poor of every description, and wherever found. But as to this, no difference of view existed: this service of Christian benevolence, says Paul, was the same which "I also was forward to do."

For the purpose of exciting an equal readiness in your minds, my brethren, to this labour of love you are requested to reflect;

I. On the duty recommended....Remember the poor.

II. On the solicitude of good men, to have this duty faithfully discharged: "*Only they would*" that we should thus act. And

III. On the example, furnished by the text, for our imitation; "I also was forward."

I. The duty in contemplation is obviously,

1. opposed to *forgetfulness*. "Remember and forget not."† The emotion which the remembrance of poverty and distress excites in the mind is a painful one; Men treat it as the hea-

*Galatians, c. 1. v. 16, 17. † Deuteronomy, c. 9. v. 7.

then did the idea of a God. They dislike "to retain" it. The current of our meditations is commonly directed by our habits. In the depth of his adversities, the prophet says, "I forgat prosperity."* In the same manner, in the midst of prosperity, we are in danger of forgetting adverse scenes. The divine majesty has placed the house of mourning "over against" the house of mirth, that while in one, we enjoy ease, competency, or it may be abundance, we may be reminded of the duty of turning the eye and employing the heart on the mansions of the other. When Joseph preferred his modest but importunate petition to the chief butler, "think on me "when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray "thee make mention of me to Pharoah and bring me out of "this house"; it is highly probable that he received protestations of sedulous attention, and with confidence waited their fulfilment. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph "but forgat him:"† so effectually is the kindling glow of humanity quenched by the tides of affluence and honour. It is well for us that the God of mercy "forgetteth not the cry "of the humble."‡ The presence of a beggar at our door, though he be perhaps an impostor, provokes our charity, by reminding us of our duty. Be assured, Brethren, a thousand cases of extreme indigence exist where the subject "cannot "beg." His sensibilities, or perhaps his sufferings, forbid him. Let him not perish. Let it not be said, "Ye have "forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto "children:" but, on the contrary, "Be not forgetful to en-"tertain strangers." "To do good and to communicate "forget not."

The duty we are contemplating stands

2. opposed to *wilful neglect*. If the patriarchs, says Paul, "had been mindful (the word in our text translated remem-

* Lamentations, c. 3 v. 17. † Genesis, c. 40th. v. 23. Psalm 9-12.
‡ Hebrews, c. 12th & 13th.

ber); "if they had been mindful of that country whence they "came out, they might have had opportunity, to have re- "turned."* But though the inhabitants of Canaan did not impede their return, nor those of Chaldea forbid it, they resolutely kept from the country they had left, and when driven by famine from the land of promise, sought relief in an opposite direction, in Egypt and not in Assyria. This wilful neglect evinced the greatness of their faith, but, the discovery, on our part, of such a temper towards the poor, must determine the absence of ours. The exterior sanctity of a Priest or a Levite will not atone for the neglect of a wounded man by the way side. Pride and luxury may scorn the Lazar at the gate, but the fire of Hell shall repay the inhuman procedure. Insensibility to the condition of the wretched is a crime. "Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from "thy poor brother."† In Philadelphia, let it never be seen that "the poor is separated from his neighbour"‡—"The "poor is hated even by his own neighbour."‖

The duty is

3. opposed to *silence* on the subject of the bounty of others. To publish the gospel is by the apostle termed remembering it§ "By faith Joseph when he died," remembered, (μεμνημένος) that is, he "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel."¶ Subjects which employ our recollection easily become themes of discourse. Let us not suppose that the case of the poor is sufficiently urged in apostolical exhortations and in occasional effusions from the pulpit; it should share the converse of the parlour. More good may be effected in this way than we, at first, may imagine. The poor are introduced into our company, and relieved without pain to themselves. Who would not aspire

* Heb. c 11. 15. † Deuteronomy, c. 15. v. 7. ‡ Prov c 14. v. 20.
‖ Prov. c. 19. v. 4. § 2 Tim. c. 2. v. 8. ¶ Heb. c. 11. v. 22.

at the double honour of doing our own duty and inciting others to accomplish theirs. Inducements to refuse are lessened, when the petitioner is known to be disinterested.

I remember, when a young man, in company with a beloved and respected tutor, the Reverend Mr. Hughes, now of Battersea, spending a day at the country seat of Miss Hannah More. It was the seat of simplicity and elegance, of literature and piety. This excellent lady who has honoured her country and her sex, and enriched the world and the church by her instructive pages, was called out of the parlour, perhaps for half an hour, in the interval between dinner and tea-time. On her return she offered an apology. It was artless and interesting. She had been administering to the relief of a poor widow, who had several, I think ten children, and offering her counsel in some circumstances of extreme embarrassment. She gave only a few outlines, but nature and truth, in a moment, completed the picture. I never more regreted that the sum, I had with me, was so trivial and never felt in an equal degree anxious to be rich, for the purpose of sharing the luxury of doing good.

Remembering the poor is

4. opposed to *inactivity*. Strictly speaking, the simple recollection of a person contributes neither to his advantage nor his injury; but with a sound, a delicate, a virtuous mind the mere recurrence of distress brings motive sufficient for imparting relief. Ancient servants of God were satisfied that it was necessary, in their afflictions, only "to put" the Lord "in remembrance." His love would attend to the rest. Of this kind, was the repeated prayer of Nehemiah, when reforming the offices of the sanctuary. "Remember me, O my God, for good".* Thus too, Job, in his calamity, cried unto the Lord "Oh that thou wouldest remember me."† "Lord remember "me"‡ was the comprehensive petition of the malefactor on

* Nehemiah, c. 13. v. 31. † Job, c. 14. v. 13. ‡ Luke, c. 23. v. 41.

the cross. The benificence of Jenovah which created man a little lower than the angels, and which crowned him with glory and honour David ascribes to his being "mindful of "him."* Remembering the poor, then, includes in it benevolent action.

We must make a reserve for them..."Let every one of you "*lay by him in store* as God hath prospered him."† If we are not able, like the generous Watts, when supported in the family of an Abney, to apply a third part of our income to the poor, a conscientious appropriation of some portion of our property to this service, highly becomes us. Paul employs the same word‡ to express fellowship and alms-giving. Our morsel is not to be eaten alone. An economical and regular reservation will be followed with many advantages. In urgent cases we shall be prepared and "ready to communicate." The false estimate we are prone to make of the magnitude of our charities will be corrected, and the extremes of parsimony and imprudence alike avoided.

We must dispense to their necessities. This duty is expressed by the terms scattering,‖ dispersing,§ opening the hand,¶ drawing out the soul,** sowing,†† watering.‡‡ Of the Parents of Job, the divine word makes no express mention : but their knowledge of the human heart and of the influence of early habits on subsequent life ; their devotedness to God and their desire for the welfare of their son may be inferred from the Patriarch's own assertions, "from my youth he (the father-"less) was brought up with me as a father ; and I have gui-"ded her (the widow) from my mother's womb." O ye Pa-

* Psalm 8. 4. † 1 Cor. 17, 2. ‡ Κοινωνια Comp, 2 Cor, 6, 14. with 2 Cor. 9, 13. and in other places. ‖ Prov 11. 24. § Psalm. 112. 9. ¶ Deut. 15. 11. ** Isaiah, 58. 10. †† 2 Cor. 9. 6. ‡‡ Prov. 11. 25.

rents, we beseech you, habituate your children to acts of benevolence. Intrust them with small sums for the purpose. Take them with you by the hand into the chambers of sorrow. Teach them to weep with them that weep....You will by such means form them for a reputable and an useful life. The course into which this good man had been guided in his youth became the easier, when the fear of God took possession of his heart....of his table "the fatherless did eat." The "loins" of the poor "blessed" him for they were warmed with the fleece of his sheep. When "the wicked" like a monster of prey would devour the indigent he "brake his jaws" and "delivered the spoil out of his teeth." Well did he deserve the character of "a father to the poor." And shall not we, my brethren, aspire at a similar honour? "Give" I beseech you "to him that needeth." Is he hungry?" feed him; is he thirsty? give him drink; is he naked? clothe him; is he sick? visit him, and take with you the reviving cordial or the requisite medicine. Is he ignorant? instruct him. Is he in perplexity? be his counsellor. Is he in his sins? pray for him. Tell him what the grace of a mediator can accomplish.

The duty we are contemplating is

5. opposed to an *inconstant* temper of mind. Alas! we are prone to be weary in well doing. Strong temptations to this, I acknowledge, may sometimes present themselves. Perhaps our good is evil spoken of; and our motives misrepresented. Perhaps our charities have proved unwisely bestowed; or have been returned with ingratitude. Perhaps the benevolence of others, whose capacity equals or exceeds our own, is seen to fail; or, it may be, because the number of cases of distress far exceeds our ability to relieve, we shrink from the magnitude of the object, and conclude on doing nothing. But, we should keep in memory, that neither calumny nor applause unthankfulness nor gratitude, is our

rule of action. If we have erred in past contributions, let us grow wiser from our mistakes. Should others fail in their services; the call is the louder for ours. If our means are limited; so is our duty. "If there be first a willing mind, it "is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according "to what he hath not."* The mite of the widow was greater in the estimation of the Son of God, than the abundance of the rich. "See" said Paul to the Corinthians, "that ye *abound* in this grace"† God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name: in that ye *have* ministered unto the saints, and *do* minister; and we desire every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."‡

The importance of the duty before us, will more fully discover itself while

II. We reflect on the solicitude of the Apostles to have it, with fidelity, fulfilled. "They would that we should "remember the poor." Some circumstances might have induced them to fear lest this office by Paul, should have remained undischarged; particularly as it related to the poor saints at Jerusalem. He was about to go to the Gentiles, but as the prejudices of the Jews against the Gentiles were great, it was to be feared lest the Gentiles should indulge corresponding ones. Besides, as Paul was on the eve of travelling, they knew not how far, probably to Illyricum, or his zeal might propel him to Spain; there was some ground for suspecting that distance might diminish his sympathies, or new objects of concern occupy the place of former ones. Paul and Barnabas seemed as like to become "pillars" among the Gentiles, as were James, and Cephas, and John, among the Jews. If the poor were by them neglected, the influence of their example would be pre-eminently injurious. Few of

* 2 Corinthians 8. 12. † 2 Cor. 8. 7. ‡ Heb. 6. 10, 11.

the actions of public characters, can be considered as private ones.

There are, however, other reasons for the solicitude the Apostles expressed, than those, which originated in the circumstances of Barnabas and Paul. Compassion to the poor is recommended by nature itself. If the instances of this, furnished by nations, who were never blessed with the oracles of God, be but few, and contain more of the proud privations of the patriot than the tender emotions of the man, it is to be ascribed chiefly to the creed, their false religion suggested. It cannot be surprising that such should be without "natural affection"* who could offer, without remorse their children to Moloch, or sacrifice an aged parent, to spare themselves the inconvenience of maintaining him.† Can it be expected that the eye which calmly sees a babe exposed to the swell of the Ganges, or suspended on a branch to become a feast for a jackall, will melt at human woe? Will that hand open itself to relieve affliction, which has just been administering flame to the pyre, on whose summit were stretched a dead and a living parent? But where superstition has not converted the heart into iron, man feels compassion for man....Thousands are to be found whose minds are enmity against God, who yet fly to alleviate distress. Atheists, who would persuade us they disbelieve the divine existence, and infidels who mock the page of inspiration, are willing to convince us they can commiserate calamity. But, this should not surprise us. Attachment to its kind commonly pervades all the varieties of animated nature.

Some speculative writers on ethicks have contended, that benevolence is "instinct or a determination of our nature an-

* 2 Rom. 3. c. 3 v. † Grotius quotes a striking passage from Tacitus who, when comparing Jewish and Roman institutions, says, Necare quemquam ex agnatis, nefas. The Jews thought it unlawful to kill a relative.

" tecedent to all reason from interest;" that man is governed in his charity, by the same kind of law, which induces the eagle to build a nest, or a lion to protect its young. If this were true, I need say no more, to night, than *follow nature! be men!* Others find the origin of this affection in " self love;" while some resolve it into " the finer sensibilities of the heart." Were such constructions admitted, I might content myself with the exhortation, *be happy! be eminent!* It is, however, better for us to assert that God commands the duty, that a heart governed by his fear, delights to fulfil it, and that his wisdom and mercy have assigned a present and final reward.

The institutions, enjoined by the Lord, during the Mosaic economy, tenderly respected the condition of the poor. Invidious distinctions were guarded against. How much soever the Hebrews might differ from each other, as to personal property, their souls were of equal value. Hence the injunction: " The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less " than half a shekel; when ye give an offering unto the Lord, " to make an atonement for your souls."* A little salt, a turtle dove, a young pigeon or a lamb, according to the ability of the offerer, proved an acceptable oblation. In harvest time the corners of the field were forbidden to be reaped; the fallen ears to be collected; and a forgotten sheaf to be fetched home. These, with the gleanings of the vineyard, were to be left " for " the poor and the stranger."† Every seventh year the land must " rest and lie still,"‡ that the poor of the people might eat.

From the dispensation of the gospel a thousand incentives to charity, unknown before, may be collected. Here, we have a display of the liberality of God, and are called to offer thanks to his name, for the unspeakable gift of the Saviour. To awaken our attention to the indigent, an apostle reminds us, that

* Exodus, c. 30. v. 14. † Levit, c. 19. ‡ Exod c. 23. v. 10.

he that was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich. Shall we share the blessings of the gospel without imbibing its spirit? What was our native state? poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, misery. What does the gospel furnish? gold tried in the fire....garments of salvation...the bread of life and the water of life. It spreads before us a feast of marrow and fat things, with wines on the lees well refined. On what terms may these blessings be obtained? On terms worthy their glorious nature, worthy the sovereign giver, and precisely adapted to our helpless condition "without money and without price." If the indulgence of an unforgiving temper towards our brethren have in it enough to alarm us, lest God should not forgive us our trespasses, to be unconcerned for the poor should alarm us no less. The determined churl may spare himself the service of asking mercy from God, for "whoso stoppeth his ear at the cry of the poor, he "also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."* It is the privilege of the believer to receive, as from a mould, the impress of the gospel of Jesus...He takes his character from its heavenly nature, and learns to be merciful, as his father who is in heaven is merciful. Love to God, to the saints, to our enemies, and to the poor, is the spirit of the religion of the cross. "But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother "have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from "him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"† The gospel thunders as well as the law. "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy."‡

The circumstances of the action itself, recommended in the text, supply a mass of motives to abound in it. Let me refer you to four, the *donation*, the *giver*, the *recipient*, and the *observers*. Consider the nature of the gift you are requested to confer. It is only "this world's goods." Gold that can be

* Prov. c. 21. v. 13. † John, c. 3 v. 17. ‡ James, c. 2. v. 13.

corrupted...meat that perisheth, garments that, if long retained, will become moth eaten. Yet even these are not properly your own. It was a Nabal, a fool, who exclaimed "shall I "take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh and give it."* The blessings of providence we enjoy are not ours, improperly to withold, much less ours to abuse. We are stewards and of our stewardship we must give an account. The talent well occupied, may conduce to the comfort of ourselves and others, but buried or wasted, must prove a curse.

But of whom do I solicit contributions this evening? Is it of a race of beings who have no need of charity? who are under no obligations to the poor? whose condition is above vicissitude? whose present station is an immortal one? Ah! my brethren, you know your situation is quite the reverse of all this! you are pensioners on the liberality of another. If your daily bread were not *given* you, you must perish. You are under a law which appeals to your self love, as a motive and rule of action. Ask yourselves, what would you wish from others were you, this evening, afflicted and destitute, and let your answer govern your conduct. The suns that now brighten your path; the landscapes that exalt your raptures and sustain your hopes, may soon be succeeded with darkness and desolation. Forget not, my brethren, that you are yet in the body. Say not to thy neighbour, "go and come again and to-morrow I will give."† Alas! to-morrow is not thine, to-morrow thy heart may be harder than to-day. To-morrow the power of doing good may be wrested from thy possession. To-morrow thou mayest be a child of penury and sickness, and in the bitterness of thy soul, thyself neglected, be heard crying, "As I have done, so God has requited me."‡ To-morrow thou mayest never see.

* Samuel, c. 25. v. 11. † Proverbs, c. 3. v. 28. ‡ Judges, c. 1. v. 7.

Art thou rich? O what a field opens before thee for useful exertion. What an opportunity for becoming (as Dr. Barrow happily expresses it) "virtuously voluptuous." Art thou poor? if thou art not able to communicate, thou canst sympathise and pray; but, let me give thee a caution: never oppress thy fellow. "A poor man that oppresseth the poor "is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food."* Above all, art thou a christian? Never forget that attention to "the "fatherless and widows in their affliction" is an important branch of "pure religion and undefiled before God and the "Father."† How does the character of a Fenelon rise in our esteem; how amiably is the spirit of the gospel, in him exemplified, who, when informed, that his library was consumed by fire, exclaimed, "I had rather it were in ashes, than the "cabin of one poor family." Let such, in the assembly, as sustain or aspire after the character of "the virtuous woman" whose "price is above rubies," recollect the fine trait in her picture. "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor, yea she "reacheth forth her hands to the needy."‡

Look at the poor man who is ready to perish. He is our brother; bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. "Did not "he that made me in the womb make him? And did not one "fashion us in the womb?"§ Created by the same arm, he is the subject of the same immortality as we. His feelings are as alive as ours to neglect or kindness. He stands in the same class of sinners, is destined to appear before the same awful tribunal, and can enter into life eternal through the grace of the same divine Saviour as we are concerned with. His poverty and our competence are but mere incidents in our existence. Neither the animal, nor the spiritual life of a man consists in the abundance of his possessions. If that same poor man is a disciple of Jesus, notwithstanding his ne-

* Prov. 28. 3. † James, 1. 27. ‡ Prov. 31, 20. § Job, 31. 15.

cessities he has durable riches; notwithstanding his thread-worn garment, he has robes of salvation and glory; notwithstanding his want of a place where he may lay his languid head, he has a mansion in the skies; he is heir to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. He is a brother of the Lord of the universe, who in all his afflictions is himself afflicted; who has permitted him to be poor, to give us an opportunity of testifying our obedience and our love to himself; and, who will not suffer a cup of cold water, administered to him, in the name of a disciple, to lose its reward. But, suppose he is not a servant of God, it is enough that he is in distress. Judgment is the Lord's, and not ours. Besides who can tell what advantages may spring from pity and relief. The divine spirit often blesses benevolent efforts to the destroying of prejudice, and the production of a desire to become acquainted with that religion which has an influence, so benign, on the hearts of its professors.

The observers of our conduct, my brethren, are numerous. There are many in *the visible world*. Ungodly men have their eyes upon us. Let us shew them that faith and charity are kindred graces. Let us put to silence their ignorance and their misrepresentation. The eyes of the saints are upon us. Let us copy the example of those noble Corinthians, whose benificence excited the gratitude, the prayers, and the affection of their brethren all around. Hear how Paul describes their generous course: "the administration of this service, not only supplieth the wants of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; while by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men. And by their prayer for you, which long after you, for the exceeding grace of God in you."*

*2 Corinthians, 9, 12. 14.

We have, moreover, good reason for believing, that in the world, which is to us, as yet, *invisible*, many an attentive spectator of our conduct exists.

The prince of darkness takes a malignant pleasure in impoverishing the bodies as well as in ruining the souls of mankind. He is a destroyer, and it appears to him, of little consequence, in what way his mischiefs are produced.* To do evil is the dreadful consolation of his existence. Could he sink every one of us in an abyss of poverty, could he oppress us with the most deplorable diseases he would do it. No sooner had God said, to him, concerning Job, "behold all that "he hath is in thy power," than he instantly enters the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who fall upon the oxen and the camels, and slay the servants with the edge of the sword. He gives

* The remarks of Mr. Baxter on this subject are such as must impress forcibly every feeling mind.

"I have, among men of my own acquaintance, observed such "admirable frustrations of many designed excellent works, by such "strange unexpected means, and by such variety of them, and so "powerfully carried on, as hath itself convinced me, that there is "a most vehement invisible malice permitted by God to resist "mankind, and to militate against all good in the world." "To "hinder the successes of godly magistrates and ministers, in their "reformings and their writings for the winning of souls, it were "endless to shew, the strange unexpected difficulties which occur, "and lamentably frustrate the most laudable attempts. I have "known men that have had resolute designs to build an Alms House, "or a School House, or to settle some public charitable work, that "when all things seemed ready, and no difficulty appeared, have "been hindred, in despight of their best endeavours all their days, "or many years: Yea, men that purposed but to put it in their wills "to do some considerable work for charity, have been so delayed, "hindred, and disappointed, that they were never able to effect their "ends. By all which it is very perceivable, to an observing mind, "that there is a working invisible enemy still seeking to destroy all "goodness and hinder men's salvation."

fury to lightnings and winds; burns up the sheep; throws down the house, in which the children of the patriarch were sitting, and rejoices to see them buried in its ruins. When permitted to touch the body of the sufferer, to the very extent of his permission, he carried his mischief. He smote him, maliciously "smote him with sore biles, from the sole of "his foot unto his crown."*

When suffered, about the time of our Lord's incarnation, in some instances, to abuse the bodies of men, the wanton production of dumbness, of deafness, of madness, or of any thing, by which the subject might be "grievously vexed," was his delight. His malevolence continues as vigorous as ever. He is tempting thousands, with fatal success to indolence, intoxication, uncleanness and discord, until "poverty come as one "that travelleth, and want as an armed man."† Would you gratify the powers of hell, I will suggest to you an easy expedient. Let your hearts be adamant, when the receptacle for your contributions is presented give little—give nothing!

But, there are holy and benevolent invisible intelligences, as well as fallen ones. "Because of the angels"‡ is an argument used by Paul, when exhorting to glory and virtue. These rejoice not in the ruin, but in the repentance of a sinner. To administer "a cake baken on the coals and a "cruse of water"‖ to a prophet in his distress; affectionately to importune his rising and eating, correspond with the character of an angel of God. You, my brethren, who are born from above, are hoping to spend an eternity in their society. Let them see that you possess their temper. Let such as are present bear to the multitudes in Heaven, the transporting information, that the trees, which God hath planted, are bending with the fruits of righteousness and love.

Above all, be assured, that God is an observer. He now sees what attention you are paying to his sovereign com-

* Job, chap. 1 & 2. † Prov. 6. 11. ‡ Cor. 11. 10. ‖ 1 Kings, 19. 6.

mand: but not as needing any thing from you. He can raise up "the poor from the dust" and "the beggar from the dunghill;" he can "set them among princes" and "make them inherit a throne of glory,"* without your concurrence; for "the "world" is his "and the fulness thereof."† But he is now waiting, awful idea! waiting to witness, how far his authority shall produce reverence, or his threatenings alarm; whether his promises shall be received with confidence, and his condescending example, for he is himself "very pitiful,"‡ constrain imitation. May your alms "come up as a memorial" before him, "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.§

To awaken and encourage you to the duty before us, I might point you to the holy men, who had evidently lived under the ideas we have been mentioning, and whose memory, the word of God embalms. I might select precedents from the history of the confessors, and martyrs of the church; or refer you to the Howards and Thorntons, on each side the Atlantic, of modern times: but I ask your attention only,

III. To the example of Paul.

Several circumstances contributed to abridge our apostles capacity of exhibiting a splendid liberality...He was a poor man. With the rest of his brethren he could say "Even unto "this present hour we both hunger and, thirst and are naked, "and are buffetted, and have no certain dwelling place."¶ Though he was convinced that the law of nature teaches that the soldier is to be publickly supported, and that the planter of a vineyard and the feeder of a flock are entitled to a portion of the wine and the milk: though the law of Moses commanded that the ox should not be muzzled which trod out the corn,

* 1 Samuel, 2. 8. † Psalm. 50. 12. ‡ James, 5. 11.
§ Phil. 4. 18. ¶ 1 Cor. 4. 11.

and that the priests should be supported from the altar; injunctions which were as much intended for the profit of the christian as of the jew; though Christ himself expressly ordained that they which preach "the gos-"pel, should live of the gospel;* and though the rest of the apostles drew their support from the churches they had planted, and it were absurd to imagine that *he only, and Barnabas*, had no such power: yet he appears early to have adopted, and without deviation, to have maintained the resolve to be "chargeable to no man."† We are not, however, without ample proof of his charitable temper. His assiduity in his occupation, as a tent maker; his urgent and ingenious exhortations; his long and fatigueing journies for the service of the poor, are sufficient indications of the bounty of his heart.

The term "forward"‡ in the text, imports contrivance, toil, the bending of the mind, an earnest pressing. Proposing himself as "an ensample" of "well-doing" to the Thessalonians, Paul mentions his working "with labour and travail by "night and day." Exhorting the Ephesians, he says, "Let "him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, "working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may "have to give to him that needeth." No man could possess a fairer pretence than our apostle for an exemption from the duty before us. Yet he does not, for a moment, avail himself of excuses which cares, and toils, and poverty, might have suggested. A part of the pittance which he earned, he considered as sacred to the poor. Is it thine to labour, my hearer, for thy daily bread, remember there are poor who cannot

* 1 Cor. 9. † 1 Cor. 11. 7.

‡ Schleusner translates the verb by studeo, operam do, incumbo, sedulo ago, studium et operam sedulam in rem impendo, urgeo; and as the sense of the apostle in the text, uses the words, quod ut a me efficeretur, omnem operam dedi; that I might assist the poor I have exerted myself to the utmost.

labour! Are thy earnings small, there are such as can earn nothing!.....Imitate the pattern I exhibit. It will be pleasant to reflect, that thy donation is the fruit of labour, and that the bread thou castest upon the waters is fairly thy own.

Men are, usually, ready to exhort others to the duties which themselves are engaged in. Conviction of their propriety and importance, creates a wish for associates. In every epistle, Paul has written, tenderness and charity are urged; but in his address to the Corinthians, he expatiates on these themes more than in any other. The munificence of the churches in Macedonia, and their expectation of the same concern for the poor, in Corinth; the peculiar circumstances of the Corinthians, as having commenced their course of charity, and as abounding in other christian graces; the conduct of God in permitting him who sows bountifully, to reap bountifully, and His ability amply to repay whatever in his service we expend; the example of Christ, the honour of God, the profit of the poor, are arguments produced and managed with heavenly wisdom, and glowing energy.

When the Grecian churches had collected a sum for those saints, among the Hebrews, who had been spoiled of their goods for the profession of the gospel, and who were, from other causes, suffering, they were at no loss for a proper person, to whose care it might be intrusted. Paul was the man....His heart was too enlarged in the cause of the poor to admit an objection to the service. He had purposed visiting Rome and Spain, but he is willing to defer his journies. As deacons to attend to the poor, in each church, were appointed, it might have appeared to a mind less noble, than his, a deviation from his office, to become a public almoner, or, at least a measure which another might as well fulfil. But he had his fears lest the unhappy prejudices of the Jewish brethren, might prevent their acceptance of a donation from gentiles; or, if received, that it might not sufficiently be understood to

be an effusion of Christian love; and an intimation that saints, in every part of the world, are one in Christ Jesus. He is not heard saying, I have done my duty in successfully urging the christians of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth to combine their bounty: if the believing Jews refuse it, let their sufferings chastise their folly. Far from this, he resolves on every toil, on every danger and sacrifice for their good. He entreats the Romans to assist him by their prayers; a most happy mode of provoking their charity also: "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the spirit, that ye strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem, may be accepted of the saints."* He could not be satisfied until, as he expressed it "this fruit" was "sealed;" the wishes of Achaia gratified, his trust discharged, the poor relieved, and the harmonizing spirit of the gospel promoted and confirmed.

Distinguished as was Paul as a bright example of charity, he is cautious to rank the duty in its proper place. He carefully maintains that a sinner's salvation is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by the washing of regeneration; the renewing of the holy ghost; the blood and righteousness of the lamb of God. Does charity "cover a multitude of faults,"† they are faults in the object and not in the person that administers. It is a fruit of the spirit, not a passport to heaven. If we bestow *all* our goods to feed the poor and have not that charity, that genuine love of God in our hearts, which is the supreme characteristic of a real disciple of Jesus, our boastings are empty as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.

* Rom. 15. † "On 1 Pet. 4. 8. compare, says Mr. Parkhurst, Proverbs, 10. 12. and then judge how groundless is that *dangerous*, but, I fear, *common* notion of *atoning* sin by *alms-giving*."

Let me open to you a channel, in which your benevolence may now diffuse itself. In August, 1807, several of the female members of this church, conceived it would conduce to their mutual profit and to the profit of others to form themselves into a friendly society. Their aims were to advance their own spiritual edification, and to lay up some small funds for the relief of the poor, against the severities of the winter season. They soon became organized; many of their female friends united with them. It is their desire that the number may be increased. The present is the third winter in which their charity has been in operation. Many are the poor and the sick whom they have supplied with food and fuel, with clothing, and whatever their exigencies might require. I will give you a short extract from the rules of the society, which will assist you in judging of the claims they have on your liberality.

Without limiting their efforts to this church and congregation, their distributing committee is commissioned "to enquire into *any* case of distress, that may come within the "notice of any sister, and to distribute such articles as may be "in possession of the society, with prudence, affection, and "sympathy." That their "funds may be made as useful, "and extend as far as possible," the committee is authorized "to dispose of them to the best advantage, in the purchase of "groceries, clothing, or any articles found necessary." Money is not given, excepting "in very particular cases" of which the committee is deemed "competent to judge." I will only add, that the calls on the society, at the present period, are numerous, loud, and affecting.

Other societies formed upon similar principles, exist in our city; and we wish them prosperity: but as the poor are always and every where to be found, the number cannot well be too great. As the spirit of the gospel is the common parent of them all, and as they ever multiply in proportion to its diffusion, we ought rather to regard their rise as an auspicious event.

ADDRESS TO THE SOCIETY.

Be encouraged, my *christian sisters*, members of the Society, to persevere in your beneficent course. It is well you have united yourselves for the good of the wretched. Let no lions in the way, tempt you to loose hands: expect discouragements and surmount them. Let your meetings be frequent, and your consultations harmonious. Renew your exertions. Aspire at the blessedness of being *rich* in good works. You are not without a present reward. The transports you will feel, when welcomed to everlasting habitations, by the pious poor, you shall have relieved, it were folly to attempt to describe. The congregation, I trust, is about to afford you a conviction of the high sense they possess of the amiableness and importance of your labours of love, by the largeness of its contributions.

What more shall I add, my brethren, to excite your liberality? Could I take you, severally, into some of the mansions of misery in our city, and shew you the pallet where the child of want and sorrow is lying; whose former condition in life makes the idea of an Alms-House afflicting, and whose distresses are cheered only by the hopes, that spring will bring better days, and that christian bosoms are not dead to sympathy? Could I place before your eyes the shivering infant, the starving grandsire, the poor widow forsaken, neglected, forgotten, or even the repenting tattered profligate, I know you would melt....in spite of all the apologies self-love might suggest, your charity would abound.

Two boats, some time ago, were sent out from Dover to relieve a vessel in distress. The fury of the tempest overset one of them, which contained three sailors, and a companion

sunk. The two remaining sailors were floating on the deep; to one of them, from the other boat, a rope was thrown, but he refused it, crying out, *fling it to Tom*, he is just ready to go down, I can last some time longer. They did so; Tom was drawn into the boat. The rope was then flung to the generous tar, just in time to save him from drowning. Look on the boisterous sea of our world. You have your conflicts, we acknowledge, but there are some who cannot *last* like you. *Throw* out immediately to their assistance, or it may be too late. Accomplish now, what I persuade myself, you thought of yesterday, during the cold and heavy snow storm. Come, my brethren, discharge your duty, adorn the gospel, disappoint the devil, gratify angels, and revere a present GOD.

FINIS.